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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2087
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1952
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2523
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001187

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FM MEREDOV DISCUSSES BILATERAL
RELATIONS/REGIONAL ISSUES WITH DAS KROL

REF: ASHGABAT 1069

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a two-hour meeting on September 2 and a three-hour private lunch on September 4 that included Charge, Deputy Chairman/Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov expressed appreciation for cooperation with the United States and dialogue with the embassy. He underscored Turkmenistan's neutral status and approach to international issues, noting in particular the country's preference to work under the UN aegis. He said Turkmenistan would like to consult with the United States on a UN convention on pipeline security. Meredov says he would be in New York for the UNGA September 29-30. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Deputy Assistant Secretary George Krol met with Deputy Chairman/Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov September 2 to discuss a wide range of issues of bilateral importance. He expressed appreciation for the bilateral relationship and for the close, regular dialogue with the Embassy. He pointed to the many areas where our two countries cooperate, including on border issues, counternarcotics, education, and Afghanistan. When questions arise, we discuss them and work them out. There are no topics that are off-limits. And although each country has its point of view, we always can have a dialogue. This dialogue will continue thanks to the Embassy and visits by high-level delegations. Meredov said that he planned to go to the UNGA and would depart Ashgabat September 27 or 28. He would give the address on September 29 and return to Turkmenistan after the UNGA concludes on September 30.

13. (C) Krol noted that the United States highly values the role that Turkmenistan plays in Central Asia and has followed its process of reforms. The United States wants to continue cooperation as a partner. He welcomed the fact that Meredov would travel to New York and have an opportunity to meet with U.S. officials there.

TURKMENISTAN IS A NEUTRAL COUNTRY

14. (C) Regarding how Turkmenistan sees the situation in the region following the events in Georgia, Meredov said the

issue should be looked at from a global point of view, because there is a global impact and not simply a regional one. He pointed to the statement the MFA released on the issue (reftel). Turkmenistan is a neutral country and does not try to get involved in the affairs of other countries. This position does not allow Turkmenistan to belong to blocks, unions, or alliances, although it is an active member of the UN. Although the country is neutral, it is not isolated. Its neutrality is positive. He noted that in the 1990s Turkmenistan offered Ashgabat as a venue for talks among the various factions in Tajikistan, under the aegis of the UN. Turkmenistan also accepted Tajik refugees. Nearly 5,000 of them left voluntarily, under the aegis of the UN, and the rest (about 16,000) in August 2005 were given Turkmen citizenship. Turkmenistan also offered Ashgabat as a venue for negotiations for Afghanistan, again under the aegis of the UN.

PIPELINE SECURITY

15. (C) Meredov said President Berdimuhamedov suggested there be a UN agreement on pipeline security, a UN Convention to guarantee adherence. Berdimuhamedov believes this will protect all countries and regions. Pipeline security is an important component of energy security. Turkmenistan is preparing a text. Meredov said Turkmenistan wants consultation with the United States on this issue. Turkmenistan is one of the largest producers of gas. Who would want to buy gas if a pipeline is destroyed or closed. After a text is produced, Meredov said, the next step would

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be to hold a meeting to show support for the resolution. He claimed the Turkmen have received positive responses from other countries, because of the impact it would have on international energy security. (COMMENT: Ambassador Miroslav Jenca, UN Preventative Diplomacy Center head, told DAS Krol that both the Russians and Chinese reacted negatively to the idea when he broached the subject with them. septel END COMMENT.) Regarding Turkmenistan's policy of selling gas on the border, Meredov said it is simpler to do it that way. Other countries are responsible for shipping the gas, and Turkmenistan gets its money.

WATER ISSUES

16. (C) Meredov said that Turkmenistan deals with its water issues bilaterally. This works out, because Turkmenistan shares many ties and traditions with its neighbors. Presidents Niyazov and Karimov signed an agreement so that the water of the Amu Darya would be shared 50/50, even though the longest leg flows through Turkmenistan. There have been no arguments. Both governments and experts work together on the issue when problems arise. In 2004, technical questions were resolved by agreement on the principle of mutual respect and dialogue. Meredov said Turkmenistan is working with Azerbaijan on delimitation. He said the issue will eventually be resolved, but patience is needed.

AFGHANISTAN AND ELECTROENERGY

17. (C) Meredov said Turkmenistan is providing electricity to Afghanistan. USAID is cooperating on this project. He noted Turkmenistan is selling the electricity at a very low price.

TERRORISM AND BORDER ISSUES

18. (C) Meredov said terrorists were still active in Afghanistan, and not just in Kandahar. Drugs are another concern with Afghanistan. Large drug burns are held 2-3 times/year. Smugglers are caught and jailed. Meredov expressed appreciation for border cooperation with the United States.

HUMAN RIGHTS

¶9. (C) Meredov said human rights is important to the Turkmenistan government. This is why the government tries to guarantee the most basic right, the right to life, as well as social guarantees, work, and education. There is free medical care and pensions are paid. He pointed to the increase in construction, free education, the re-establishment of the Supreme Council on Science and Technology (formerly the Academy of Science), and the resumption of graduate education. Russia opened a branch of the Gubkin Oil and Gas Institute. New schools are being built and Internet access is being put in the schools. On September 1, 250 students were sent to Russia to study in universities there. Students also go to Ukraine, Malaysia, Belarus, and the United States to study. A diplomatic academy for training new diplomats was opened.

¶7. (C) On the topic of religious freedom, Meredov said there are 97 or 98 Islamic groups, 13 Orthodox churches and 11 other groups, including Baptists and Bahais that are registered. If five people get together, they can form a church. On alternative service, Meredov said the constitution requires male citizens to serve in the military. Law enforcement cannot ignore the law. UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief Asma Jahangir will be in Turkmenistan for a week. Groups, whether they are NGOs or religious groups, have to register in each of the places where they are active. Meredov said the Embassy was told there is no objection to the registration of an alumni group.

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¶8. (C) Meredov said the country is following the president's lead, step-by-step. The Turkmen are listening to others on the development of mass media. There will be press attaches in every embassy, and each ministry and embassy will have its own website.

¶9. (C) There is an ongoing dialogue with the ICRC office in Tashkent. Institute for Democracy and Human Rights Director Shirin Akhmedova met with Amnesty International in London. However, you need mutual understanding to have a dialogue.

GLOC

¶10. (C) During a private lunch with DAS Krol and Charge on September 4, Meredov reiterated many of the same points made in the earlier meeting. However, on the topic of GLOC, he said that Turkmenistan is able to do a great deal of cooperation with the United States, but that type cooperation would have to be low key.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Meredov offered standard talking points on several topics, including human rights. Nevertheless, it is clear he and Turkmenistan appreciate cooperation with the United States and the role our country plays in promoting reform. During the lunch, Meredov expanded on a number of points from the earlier meeting. However, the main point of the lunch was not only to get to know each other but also to follow through on the president's explicit instructions to Meredov to host DAS Krol as a sign of the special high-level attention they want to give relations with the United States.
END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) DAS Krol cleared this cable.
CURRAN